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ABSTRACT

A comparison of divorced single-parent fathers (N=33) and divorced single-parent mothers (N=38) found the two groups comparable on several variables: place of residence, race, age, number and age of children, religion, reported mental problems, and alcohol and drug usage. Fathers were somewhat better educated, had higher incomes, and tended to stay in their homes and communities after the divorce, while mothers tended to move. A 63-item questionnaire probed six areas: (1) history of the divorce process; (2) feelings as a single parent; (3) childrearing issues; (4) children's feelings and behaviors; (5) relations with the ex-spouse; and (6) forming new social relationships. On only one question were the responses of the mothers and fathers significantly different: nearly a third of single-parent fathers but only one mother, reported encouraging their children to side with them. Data indicate fathers are as competent as mothers in raising children alone.
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Coping as Divorced Single Parents: A Comparative Study of Fathers and Mothers*

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Coping as Divorced Single Parents: A Comparative Study of Fathers and Mothers

One important by-product of the women's movement has been the explosion of interest in the paternal role in the past half-dozen years. Formerly ignored by researchers as being only tangential to the processes of child development, fatherhood in these days of androgyny is now commonly seen as both an "instrumental" and "expressive" role.

Parallel to the women's movement has been an upsurge in the divorce rate. There are many who see a causal link between the two; and, whether our self-definition is that of "knee-jerk liberal" or "arch-conservative," it is undeniable that family interaction has been tremendously affected by feminist expectations. The divorce rate hovers at 5.1 per 1,000 population, double the divorce rate in 1966 of 2.5 (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1978). For every two marriages each year nation-wide, there is roughly one divorce. There are more than 4.5 million families with children under 18 headed by a single parent (U.S. Census Bureau, 1975).

Solid statistics elude us today, but perhaps only one out of every ten or fifteen divorced single parents is a male. The heavy hand of tradition has certainly influenced this statistic, helping to dictate a situation in which mothers gain custody of the children--plus the attendant joys and sorrows of that role--and fathers are left only with occasional, often uncomfortable visitations, and bittersweet memories.

In the past three years a handful of studies have appeared in the literature evaluating the emerging role of the divorced single parent

father. The research, not surprisingly, indicates these are both positive and negative aspects of the role. When compared with other studies of single parent mothers, the results appear strikingly similar.

But, such comparisons lack validity, for sample differences place the student of divorce squarely in the middle of an apples and oranges dilemma. Clearly, a study design incorporating both divorced single parent fathers and mothers of comparable circumstance and setting would be superior. With this design, a more credible evaluation of the role of divorced single parent father can be made, given the comparative context of divorced single parent mothers to place it in. The study to be reported here was an effort to do just that.

Such a study is of considerable heuristic value. Psychologists, lawyers, and judges are continually confronted by the difficult question: Can a man successfully rear children alone? The number of fathers who answer this question affirmatively before the bench will probably continue to grow each year; our institutions need more solid data on which to base their decisions. Tradition, no matter how time-worn and hallowed, is inadequate justification.

A Review of the Literature

Single parent fathers are certainly not a new phenomenon in our culture, or any other for that matter. The maternal mortality rate was 58 deaths per 10,000 live births in 1935, compared with our present decade's rate of 2.5 deaths per 10,000. Offsetting this lowering maternal death rate, however, has been the increasing divorce rate. Between 1970 and 1975 the number of single parent fathers increased from 212,000 to 324,000 (U.S.

Census Bureau, 1975).

U.S. News and World Report (1973) indicated that the number of independent divorced and separated mothers heading households increased by 58% between 1965 and 1972, while single father numbers heading households increased by 71%. Spouse mortality between those years increased only 8% for fathers and 3% for mothers.

These figures, of course, do not herald the dawn of a new age in which fathers will take custody of the children in a divorce suit, and mothers will go off to exciting careers. But, the modest increase in the ratio of divorced single parent fathers to divorced single parent mothers they reflect indicates that the challenge to traditional perspectives has had some effect.

Gasser and Taylor (1976) indicated that fathers who have taken over some of the traditional female roles in an intact family or shared tasks with their wives may not have the hesitation of the past to assume the role as custodial parent in a divorce case. Another Gasser and Taylor (1976) study was developed to explore the role adjustment of single parent fathers with dependent children. Their definition of adjustment referred to the rearrangement or alteration of roles of the father from the roles held in a once intact family, to the roles necessary to accommodate the different needs of a new one-parent family. Forty single parent fathers living with dependent children (25-divorced, 15-widowed) under 18, with no wife present due to divorce or death were used as subjects.

Gasser and Taylor (1976) reported fathers to have been more active in childcare than household duties before divorce. Fathers had reported

being active in childcare activities like bathing, dressing, and feeding, while 30% claimed to have no responsibility for childcare. Twenty percent of the fathers had full discipline responsibilities.

Problem areas mentioned by single fathers were dating (57.5%), business trips (55.0%), and pursuance of job possibilities which were troublesome for 45% of the sample fathers (Gasser & Taylor, 1976). Many fathers gave up memberships in clubs either due to lack of interest, time, or lack of a sense of feeling part of the group as a single parent. This lack of interest sometimes is transferred to single parent organizations as reported by 70% of the sample. Gasser and Taylor (1976) reported the sample fathers felt adjusted and free of problems, even being a single parent, compared to pre-divorce turmoil. The researchers noted a sense of wanting to succeed in their situation of single parenting in an undefined role. Twelve of the twenty-five divorced fathers felt they had more friends now than before the divorce.

Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) conducted lengthy semi-structured interviews with twenty single parent fathers from the Greensboro, North Carolina area. The researchers interviewed fathers from different socio-economic backgrounds in order to have some idea of the breadth of the single parent father experience. Each of the fathers interviewed had custody of dependent children, ten households had children 18 months to 5 years and ten households with children 6 to 17 years of age. Nine fathers had one child, nine fathers had two children, and two fathers had three children. The age range of fathers was 25 to 64 while the average age was 37. The researchers reported a variety of reasons for single

fathers obtaining custody. Fifteen fathers were divorced, three fathers were widowed, and two never had been married.

Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) found single fathers to have above average social status. The researchers thought this not too surprising since a father most likely would have to demonstrate a degree of resource stability that would be approved by the courts, peers, and possibly even his former spouse. The fathers sampled also were above average in job status: thirteen professional or managerial positions, one salesman, and five blue collar workers (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). The average annual income of the sample fathers was $18,000. The unavailability of lower socioeconomic single parent fathers suggests their frequency is lower in the population and that they remarry faster than men with higher incomes (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). It was also noted that even though these fathers appear to be competent fathers, a majority of them received custody because their former wives did not want or were not able to have custody. Reasons listed were desertion, mental illness, drugs and alcohol, and general mental instability of wives (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976).

The fathers in the Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) study reported active social lives. This was their primary means of adult companionship. While all fathers reported most of their social activities centered around their children, female friends, or themselves, ten fathers indicated a significant amount of their time was spent in activities with other roles. There was no indication that social activities were limited to singles only (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). Burgess (1970) noted

that while divorced women are sometimes looked upon as a negative threat to married men by wives, single fathers don't appear to have this stigma. Burgess went on to speculate this to be possibly due to the traditional freedom attributed to males, at any time, rather than the passive attractiveness of women.

Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) reported an important part of single parent fathers' lifestyle was dating. Nineteen of the twenty subjects mentioned earlier indicated recent dating. Even after an average of three years of single parenting these people mostly were "dating around". This characteristic was surprising to researchers, if for no other reason than alleviation of parental strain (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976).

Sex was indicated by single fathers as an area of concern. One-third of the fathers reported frequent sexual contacts; the others possibly were against cohabitation while raising dependent children. Most of these fathers thought it was fine for others as a way of testing a relationship, but not for themselves. A need for sexual discretion was felt by single fathers and also it was generally felt that cohabitation lacked permanence which the fathers felt children needed.

The majority of single parent fathers believed that one parent is often better than two if the two cannot live together happily (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). The efficiency of daughters being reared by their fathers was a split issue between subjects; 12 felt they should be reared the same and eight differently. The fathers who had daughters were more likely to note the need for differences in socialization

(Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). The two fathers who had daughters in puberty were concerned over proper sex education. Overall though, fathers felt generally competent in childrearing.

Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) compared many of the problems of single parent fathers to those of single parent mothers: harmonizing parental and adult roles and responsibilities, lack of patience, time for children, making decisions alone, and not enough time spent being just around their children. All twenty single parent fathers in the Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) study felt they had good rapport with their children, a close and affectionate relationship. Two-thirds of the fathers thought their children had similar experiences as other children. "Time" is the most frequent compensation fathers reported for only one parent.

Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) noted that the single parent father's situation is special and requires special attention and compensating services. Since single parent fathers are usually employed and receive no alimony, they mostly arranged with daycare centers and nursuries for preschool children. Group care was preferred over home care by friends or relatives. Educational program was the most important criterion of fathers in selecting childcare facilities. Fathers were divided on sex preference of teachers they preferred to teach their children in child care facilities. Child care didn't present problems for most single fathers. After school care varied ranging from full time housekeeper to no supervision. Children over nine generally were on their own after school until their father came home. Night time services for child care were minimal though. Most fathers reported taking children with them shopping, on errands

and sometimes even dating. When the children can't go, babysitting, friends, and relatives provide child care.

The higher average income of most single fathers studied makes them ineligible for public support (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). One-third of these fathers received some form of public assistance--food stamps, government pension, Social Security--but rarely was this assistance because of single parenting.

In the North Carolina area researchers met with mixed reactions to single parent groups as far as effectiveness. Primarily they were for social gathering, other organizations for information were community and religious organizations (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976). Researchers noted though that improvement could be made in supportive organizations for the lower income single parents.

Single fathers could count on relatives for short and temporary situations, but fathers didn't rely on them very much. When family problems arose though, fathers went to relatives first (Orthner, Brown, & Ferguson, 1976).

Mendes (1976) reported on a similar study of 32 single fathers from Southern California. Subjects were referred by researchers, educators, physicians, social workers, and white collar workers. This study used a non-probability sample as did Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976).

The sample (Mendes, 1976) consisted of 21 divorced, 4 separated, and 7 widowed fathers. Average length of single parenthood was 2-3 years with an age range of children being 1 through 6. Mean number of children being raised in each home was 2.5. Single fathers ranged in

age from 25-59 years of age.

Mendes (1976) reported that all the subject fathers had performed paternal roles in an intact family. Upon becoming single fathers, each man had to modify some aspect of his usual role performance. Four areas of adjustment were examined: supervision and protection of children, homemaking, children's emotional needs, rearing daughters in a motherless home.

Only eight of the thirty-two fathers discharged supervision and protection to outside care. The other fathers were able to "synchronize". Aldous (1969) used the concept of synchronization to refer to relationships between family needs, job hours, and geographical mobility. An example would be a teacher father and student son at the same school; or a child waiting at work after school for his or her father to get off work (Mendes, 1976). One father gave up his job and became a welfare recipient.

Mendes (1976) supports Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) in reporting single fathers' dislike for in-home childcare. Mendes reported fathers most happy when children are supervised in a daycare setting. Fathers felt in-home care was inadequate, unsupervised, and often caretakers didn't like their (the fathers') children (Mendes, 1976). Fathers also felt childcare facilities had better trained, more dedicated staff. Mendes (1976) also supports Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976), in that fathers hired others to care for their preschool children, but older children had no supervision after school. Some fathers enrolled their children in various after school activities to take up the time.

Mendes (1976) noted a lack of help from extended family members.

Either kin lived far away or fathers felt reluctant to ask them for much assistance.

Twenty-eight of the thirty-two fathers regularly cooked, cleaned, shopped, and managed their homes (Mendes, 1976). This is contrary to Orthner, Brown, and Ferguson (1976) where the household duties were divided among family members. None of Mendes' (1976) fathers reported a loss of masculinity feeling over housework. Most of the fathers previously knew how to cook.

The fathers in the Mendes (1976) study did report stress in trying to coordinate all the various tasks.

Emotional needs of children (Mendes, 1976) was defined as how love and affection was shown in the family. Preadolescent children received physical hugging and kissing while older children did not. Fathers showed love by giving them a nice home. Fathers thought children could show love by cooperating and helping (Mendes, 1976). Only three fathers reported having trouble meeting their children's emotional needs.

Twenty of the thirty-two fathers were raising daughters, ranging from 2 1/2 through 15 years old. Mendes (1976) also reported the fathers' biggest concern over childrearing was sexual. More of these fathers thought women should educate the daughters on sexual functions. Female role model was another mentioned problem of fathers, usually arranging for daughters to spend time with her mother or some other mature female for the purpose of sex education teaching.

Sampling

The subjects involved in this research project were 33 single parent fathers and 38 single parent mothers from the state of Nebraska. Both single parent fathers and single parent mothers received custody of their children as the result of divorce.

A larger number of mothers than fathers participated in the study, but a larger percentage of fathers returned questionnaires. Out of 86 questionnaires sent to single parent mothers 38 were returned (44%). A total of 55 questionnaires were sent to single parent fathers; 33 were returned (60%).

The geographical location of the sample was mainly Lincoln and Omaha for both single parent mothers and single parent fathers. Other subjects came from various smaller and rural communities in Nebraska.

Obtaining a sample of participants was the most difficult part of this project. Contacting fathers and mothers raising dependent children as the result of divorce was attempted in several ways with varying degrees of success. Word of mouth was the first method used, but this approach yielded only seven contacts. Public service announcements on radio stations and in newspapers proved to be the best way of contacting prospective subjects. Announcements were sent to radio stations and newspapers in the Lincoln and Omaha area and those announcements were noticed by some smaller newspapers and printed in their rural editions. The sample, then, was limited to volunteers. This is not seen as a major flaw in the study, for in most survey studies professional ethics demands that subjects participate on their own volition. Since in almost every

survey study a relatively significant proportion of individuals choose not to participate, survey research tends to suffer an across-the-board volunteer bias. By advertising for volunteers in precisely the same way, the researchers felt they, in theory, had some control over this bias.

The Instrument

The instrument used in the study was designed by the authors. It went through numerous drafts and pilot tests before its final composition was agreed upon. Seven lengthy pilot interviews conducted with single parent fathers assured the researchers of its utility.

The questionnaire was used in this study for three reasons: contact could be made with more parents in a larger geographical area, participants could fill out the questionnaire in the privacy of their home, and interviewer bias would be avoided. One disadvantage of questionnaire use was incomplete return rate.

The questionnaire obtained general information on divorce and also dealt specifically with the problems and advantages of being a single parent raising dependent children.

Instrument Administration

Upon receiving confirmation from a single parent agreeing to participate in the study, a questionnaire was sent accompanied by a cover letter and return envelope. Parents were not informed until after the completion of the research that mothers were being compared to fathers. It was felt that prior knowledge could lead to a contest-like atmosphere in which the ancient battle of the sexes would be fought on yet another

field of honor.

Sample Characteristics

The age range for single parent fathers was 23-64 with the mean age for single parent fathers being 37.2. The fathers averaged 2.03 children in their custody. The mean age for children of single parent father families was 10.4 with an age range of 1-21.

The age range for single parent mothers was 28 to 62 years with a mean of 36 years. The mothers averaged 1.79 children in their custody. Age range for the children was 6 months to 39 with a mean of 11.3 years.

The race of both single parent fathers and single parent mothers was predominately white in this study. One single parent mother family was Native American and one single parent mother family was Chicano.

79% of the fathers had education past high-school compared with 63% of the mothers.

The modal occupational level for both single parent fathers and single parent mothers was professional (fathers, 39%; mothers, 51%). 21% of the mothers were clerical workers, and 13% students. 24% of the fathers were skilled workers, and 19% semi-skilled workers.

Income levels were higher for single parent fathers; the range of incomes was greater for single parent mothers. The mean income for single parent fathers was $15,700 with a range of $5,000-$27,000. The mean income for single parent mothers was $12,500 with a range of $3,700-$28,000.

Religious preference among the single parents was similar. The predominate religion chosen was Protestant (45% single parent fathers

and 53% single parent mothers). Second religious preference was Catholic (24% single parent fathers and 26% single parent mothers). Church membership was indicated by 45% of the single parent fathers and 53% of the single parent mothers.

The mean age at divorce for single fathers in this project was 32.7 years old. The mean amount of time since the divorce for the single fathers was 4 years. Mean age of marriage for single parent fathers was 23. Single parent mothers in this project were divorced at a mean age of 28, have been divorced 3 years, were married at 20 years of age.

Mental problems were not indicated by single parents to be a common problem. Only 12% of the single parents indicated any mental disturbances in their families. Four single parent fathers and five single parent mothers.

Alcohol and drug use was light for both single parent mothers and single parent fathers.

An important difference between the two groups was in moving patterns after the marital separation. Single parent fathers generally stayed where they were, while single parent mothers tended to move within the state. Fathers often remained in the community in the home, while mothers moved from the community into apartments in another town after the divorce.

In sum, then, on a number of sample characteristics that conceivably could influence coping patterns, the fathers did not differ greatly from the mothers. On three measures, lack of mobility, education, and income, fathers held an advantage. The sampling procedures in our judgment success-

fully obtained a sample adequate to the task of testing a number of hypotheses.

Hypotheses

The researchers formulated a total of 63 hypotheses. These focused on six global areas: the history of the divorce process; feelings as a single parent; child-rearing issues; the children's feelings and behaviors; relations with the ex-spouse; and forming new social relationships.

Because more than 130 separate chi square and t-tests had to be computed to analyze these individual hypotheses, the results of the research will be greatly abbreviated below to preserve the reader's good humor. Numbers, which can imply a sense of precision to the reader (often giving a false sense of veracity) will for the most part be deleted from the results of the study. The numbers might benefit the reader by providing detail, but these details would be unnecessarily tedious to unravel. In short, the numbers were generated, the tests were computed, but we don't want the reader to miss the forest for the trees. The results of the study were too painstakingly gained to be lost in numerical confusion. Criterion level for test analysis was .05.

History of the Divorce Process

Before the divorce what was your family life like?

There was no significant difference between pre-divorce family life between single parent fathers and single parent mothers. On a Likert-type scale ranging from "generally good" to "a poor atmosphere,"

most mothers and fathers checked "more bad than good."

What were some contributing factors in your divorce?

Lack of communication led the list of perceived causes, followed by extra-marital affairs, sexual problems, and loss of interest. Separate chi square tests on each category indicated no significant difference between mothers and fathers. The two groups do not differ in their perceptions of how the divorce came about.

Do you think the children were a cause of the divorce?

Single parent mothers and fathers did not differ significantly on this question. The vast majority (81%) felt children did not contribute to the divorce.

How determined were you to make the marriage work?

Most of the single parents (66%) indicated much interest in making the marriage work. Mothers did not differ significantly from fathers.

How was the divorce treated by friends and relatives?

A handful of mothers and fathers indicated difficulties in dealing with relatives during the divorce, but most did not see any problems. The two groups did not significantly differ.

How much did you want custody of your children?

One father stated he did not want custody, but felt he was coping well with the situation anyway. All other parents stated they desired custody; the two groups did not differ significantly in their feelings on this issue.

Did you seek any advice, agency, information, etc., on parenting when you found out you would have custody?

The groups did not differ significantly on this dimension. Only 7 fathers and 6 mothers reported seeking advice or information, mostly from magazine articles and books.

What degree of stress did you consider the divorce to be?

Divorce was considered to be a medium high to highly stressful event by both single parent fathers and mothers. A handful of fathers said the divorce caused little stress to them. Mean scores for the groups, computed from a Likert-type scale, were not significantly different.

How do you feel about your divorce looking back?

Single parents were about equally divided on this issue. Roughly half were "glad it happened," while the other half "wish the marriage could have been patched up." Mothers did not differ significantly from fathers.

How would you describe your family life now?

Family life for both groups, generally, was reported to have improved after the divorce. The difference between the groups was not significant.

* * * * *

Ten questions dealt in the general area of the history of the divorce process. In sum, fathers and mothers did not differ significantly on responses to any of these ten questions.

Feelings as a Single Parent

How would you describe the relationship between you and your children?

Both groups overwhelmingly felt they had a good relationship with the children. The difference was not statistically significant.

Do you think of yourself as parent or friend to your children?

The majority of parents thought of themselves as both parent and friend to the children, depending upon the specific situation. There was no significant difference between the groups.

How well do you communicate with your children?

Generally both groups reported good communication patterns. Fathers and mothers did not differ significantly in this respect.

What is your general mood like around your children?

Both groups indicated their moods had improved since the divorce, in general. Initial fear on the part of many parents subsided after a time. Men and women did not differ significantly.

Does being a single parent seem to have created any nervous habits in you?

18% of the fathers and 23% of the mothers reported nervous habits. This difference was not statistically significant.

Do you feel guilty for not taking better care of your children?

A handful of parents reported they could do a better job, but the vast majority expressed no guilt. Mothers and fathers did not significantly differ.

Do you feel overburdened by the children?

One mothers said yes. All other respondants felt they were not overburdened. Mothers and fathers were not significantly different.

How well do your children think you are doing as a single parent?

The majority of both groups of parents felt they were doing well. Fathers and mothers did not significantly differ.

If you had to do it over again, would you raise children alone?

Fathers and mothers, generally, preferred two parents to one. But, if the situation were to arise again, almost all would tackle it. One mother and one father expressed doubts. The groups did not differ significantly.

* * * * *

Nine questions dealt with feelings about single parenting, and feelings as a single parent. On none did the two groups differ significantly.

Childrearing Issues

Do you get to spend the right amount of time with your children?

Only a handful of parents in both groups indicated they got to spend as much time with the children as they would prefer. Fathers and mothers did not differ statistically significantly on this question.

How are duties divided in your family?

There was no significant difference between how fathers and mothers divided up household labor. As the children grew, of course, they tended to have more responsibilities.

What percentage of income do your children contribute to the total family income?

Very few children in either group contributed to family income. Fathers and mothers responded similarly with no statistical difference.

Do your children contribute to the decision-making processes of the family?

The modal response for both groups was "sometimes." Second choice was "no." The groups did not significantly differ.

Have your ways of disciplining your children changed since the divorce?

The vast majority of parents had not changed their discipline approaches since the divorce. Fathers did not significantly differ from mothers.

Since the divorce, do you yell at the children more or less?

The majority of both groups reported infrequent yelling; most of the parents who did yell said this behavior had decreased since the divorce. The groups were not significantly different in this respect.

Do you hit the children more or less now?

A minority of parents reported that they hit the children; most of these said their hitting had decreased since the divorce. The difference between men and women was not significant.

How do you deal with the children's anger?

There was not a significant difference between single parent fathers and mothers on how they deal with children's anger. The groups both reported little physical violence against the children; rather, parents dealt with the anger verbally. Two fathers and one mother reported "some hitting and yelling."

Has sex education been part of your childrearing experience?

Could you rate the quality of this experience?

55% of the parents reported discussions of the "facts of life" with the children in the family. All said these discussions were satisfactory. A handful of fathers expressed concern about their daughters, but said a female relative or friend had helped out in the discussions. There was no significant difference between men and women on this question.

Have your views concerning your children and their sexual involvements changed?

Less than a third of the parents reported attitudinal changes. The difference between groups was not significant.

* * * * *

Ten questions explored a number of childrearing issues with the single parents. The responses of the fathers did not differ significantly from the mothers on any question.

Children's Feelings and Behavior

Was the divorce discussed with the children before it occurred?

Less than a fourth of the parents discussed the divorce beforehand. Fathers did not differ significantly from mothers.

How well do your children understand why their parents divorced?

There was no significant difference between mothers and fathers on this question; both groups felt the children, in general, had a good understanding of the situation.

What were the initial effects on your children when your ex-spouse left?

The vast majority of parents reported the initial effects of the separation to be stressful to the children. In fact, more than half reported that the effects were "traumatic," the most severe category on the Likert-type scale devised for this question. Fathers and mothers did not differ significantly on this question.

Do your children talk much about the divorce?

Fathers and mothers did not answer this question significantly different. Most of the children only mentioned the divorce on occasion.

Do your children feel guilt over the divorce?

The overwhelming response of both groups to this question was no. Fathers and mothers did not differ significantly.

Do your children want you to marry again?

Parents responded that the majority of children did want them to re-marry. The difference between groups was not significant.

How do your children treat you as a parent now, after the divorce?

The great majority of parents reported that the children were kind and respectful of them after the divorce. Fathers and mothers did not differ significantly on this question.

Do you think your children communicate their true feelings to you?

The majority of both parent groups felt the children usually were honest with them. Mothers and fathers were not significantly different in this regard.

Have the children had any change in physical ills?

The majority of both single parent groups reported no changes in the children's health. The difference was not significant.

How are the children's grades after the divorce?

Mothers and fathers did not differ significantly in their response to this question. The majority of both groups reported school achievement to be unchanged since the divorce. A few reported higher grades; none reported lower grades.

Has the children's social life changed since the divorce?

The parents' predominate answer to this question was no. The groups did not differ significantly.

Are the children harder to control since the divorce, or easier?

The majority of mothers and fathers said their task was easier since the divorce. The groups were not significantly different in their response on this question.

How do the children express anger toward you?

The parents could choose from a number of responses, including "verbal," "verbal and physical," "silence," and "leave." The majority in both groups chose "verbal." The groups did not differ significantly on these dimensions.

Have any of your children ever mentioned anyone saying anything to them about having their mother/father raising them alone?

Overwhelmingly the parents responded no. The mothers and fathers did not significantly differ.

Who would the children prefer to live with?

There was no significant difference between mothers and fathers on this question. Mothers indicated the children wished to stay with them; fathers indicated the children wished to stay with them.

* * * * *

Fifteen questions explored feelings and behaviors of the children of divorced single parents, as reported by the parents. There were no significant differences between mothers and fathers on any of these fifteen questions.

Relations with the Ex-Spouse

When does your ex-spouse have the children?

Both fathers and mothers had similar arrangements with ex-spouses. Summers were the most common times, followed holidays and weekends. The difference between groups was not significant.

Did the ex-spouse ever cutoff contact with the children?

A handful from each parent group had done so. Mothers did not differ significantly from fathers.

Do you instruct your children on how they should feel about your ex-spouse?

Most single parents indicated they did not. The groups did not differ significantly.

Do you or your ex-spouse encourage the children to take sides?

Nearly a third of the single parent fathers did say they encouraged the children to side with them. Only one of the mothers said she encouraged this. The difference between the two groups was significant ($p < .01$).

Have your children stated if they wanted you to reconcile with your ex-spouse?

Slightly more than half of the parents (53%) reported the children had noted they wanted a parental reconciliation. The difference between the two groups was not significant.

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On five questions dealing with the continuing relationship with the ex-spouse, the mothers and fathers differed significantly on one response.

Forming New Social Relationships

Do you want to marry again?

There was no significant difference between single parent fathers and mothers on this dimension. 55% of the parents wanted to re-marry; 25% were undecided; and 13% were against remarriage.

Would you be interested in a mate with children?

The groups did not differ significantly on this issue; more than half of the mothers and fathers were interested.

Do you have an interest in dating?

Both men and women were very interested in dating. No significant difference existed between the groups.

Do you see other men/women socially?

There was no significant difference between fathers and mothers regarding social dating. 78% of the parents were going out.

Do your children know this?

92% of the parents responded their children were aware of their dating. There was no significant difference between men and women.

Do you bring dates to your home socially?

Three-fourths of both groups did so; fathers did not differ significantly from mothers.

How do your children feel about your dating?

More than 70% of the children felt positive about dating, according to the parents; the groups did not significantly differ.

Do your children prefer some dates over others?

The majority of both groups answered yes; no significant difference between the two.

Do your children remark about you and your date as possible mates?

Most of the parents responded "sometimes." Children of fathers did not differ significantly from children of mothers.

Have your views on sexuality changed since your divorce?

The majority of both groups responded no. Fathers and mothers did not significantly differ.

Are your children aware of any sexual involvement?

67% of the fathers and 53% of the mothers responded that the children were not aware of any sexual involvement. This difference was not significant.

Have you ever discussed this with them?

About a third of each parent group had discussed sexual involvements with their children. Fathers and mothers did not differ significantly.

Would you live with a mate (unmarried) while any of your children were at home?

Roughly a third of each group responded they would cohabit. The difference was not statistically significant.

Where do you usually go to relax?

In order of importance: home; friends' houses; a restaurant or lounge; a bar; a sporting event. The groups did not differ significantly on this question. Five fathers and five mothers reported they visit a bar occasionally.

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Fourteen questions probed the social, dating, and sex lives of the mothers and fathers. On no question did the two groups exhibit any

significant difference in their responses.

Conclusion

Two groups of divorced single parents, fathers and mothers, were sampled in similar manners. The groups were comparable on a number of variables, including geographic place of residence, race, age, number and age of children, religion, and reported mental problems and alcohol and drug usage. On three indices the groups differed somewhat: fathers were somewhat better educated; they made about $2,500 more per year in income; and they tended to stay in their homes and community after the divorce while mothers tended to move more often.

Both groups of parents responded to anonymous questionnaires probing six general areas of coping patterns and adjustment to single parenthood: the history of the divorce process; feelings as a single parent; childrearing issues; the children's feelings and behaviors; relations with the ex-spouse; and forming new social relationships. A total of 63 questions were asked in these six areas. On only one question were the responses of the mothers and fathers significantly different.

The data indicates, in general, that fathers are just as competent as mothers in raising children alone.

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